

## Chapter Three

# Responses to Sentimentalist Gender Conceptions

This chapter discusses responses of Russian women writers to topics in Sentimentalist culture and literature, including displays of modesty as a publication strategy, as reflected, for instance, in the prefaces of women authors. My investigation further argues that some aspects at least of the Sentimentalist focus on the private sphere were beneficial to women writers, making them feel appreciated in their everyday social roles. Once they realised that they were in the spotlight, some women writers embarked on subtle challenges of the social inequalities they were subject to. I will also suggest that Sentimentalist equation of woman with nature provided women authors with poetic metaphors which allowed them to justify their activities as writers. Along with elevated Sentimentalist regard for femininity, some women authors began to revise the ways in which female characters were represented, in particular challenging Sentimentalist notions of female naivety and death.

### The obstacles of decency, virtue, and modesty

Women writers found different ways to respond to the topics in Sentimentalist culture and literature. In order to express their opinions, however, they had to overcome several obstacles. If they wished to draw attention to the inequality experienced in the private sphere of the home, for example, they had to transgress the criterion of decency. Although a fundamental feature of Sentimentalist ethics was to shed light on different human experiences, including those of women, only a restricted number of subjects found their way into literature. Decency, a principal feature of Classicist aesthetics, remained the main selection criterion for topics in Sentimentalist narratives.<sup>1</sup> Literary criticism of the social situation of women therefore had to occur within these constraints. This is why the Sentimentalist focus on the private sphere succeeded only in part to shed light on the problems women faced in a patriarchal society. This suggests that it was particularly difficult for women to address this topic since they were even more strongly subject to the notion of decency than men. Moreover, women writers

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1 Andreas Schönle: 'The Scare of the Self'. *Slavic Review* 57, 1998, pp. 723–746 (p. 745).

were not supposed to display their interest in learning: erudition conflicted with the Sentimentalist image of women, as Diana Greene has shown in her study of Elizaveta Kul'man (1808–1825).<sup>2</sup>

A woman wishing to publish a literary work was an affront to the ideal of modesty and domestic decency associated with the female sex. The example of Mariia and Elizaveta Moskvina illustrates the pretence of reluctance forced on any Sentimentalist woman writer who wished to share her work with a wider readership. One critic claims that they had to be *persuaded* to publish their works by men of letters. Similarly, in the preface to one of her works, Liubov' Krichevskaja assures her readers that her friends had approved of her works, requesting their publication.<sup>3</sup> This kind of imposed female modesty was also reflected in Western European literature. In a scene in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749–1832) novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (Wilhelm Meister's Travels), published in 1821, for instance, it is only on her friend's strong insistence that artist Hilarie allows the male guests to see her paintings.<sup>4</sup> When Karolina Pavlova read her poems to the *habitués* of her salon in the 1840s, she clashed with social conventions of female modesty, provoking an unflattering portrait by Ivan Panaev, one of her visitors.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Diana Greene: 'Nineteenth-Century Women Poets. Critical Reception vs. Self-Definition'. In: Clyman, Toby W. / Greene, Diana (eds): *Women Writers in Russian Literature*. Greenwood Press: London 1994, pp. 94–109 (pp. 97–98).

3 [Anon.]: 'Mariia Osipovna Moskvina'. *Damskii zhurnal* 27, 1830, pp. 6–8 (p. 6); M. Makarov: 'Mariia Timofeevna Pospelova'. *Damskii zhurnal* 16, 1830, pp. 34–38 (p. 35);

Liubov Krichevskaja: *No Good without Reward. Selected Writings. A Bilingual Edition*. Baer, Brian James (ed.): Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies: Toronto 2011, p. 41.

4 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Wilhelm Meister*. Trunz, Erich (ed.): Beck: München 1989, p. 237:

‘... die ältere Freundin schwieg daher nicht länger, sondern tadelte Hilarien, dass sie mit ihrer eigenen Geschicklichkeit hervorzutreten auch diesmal, wie immer, zaudere; hier sei die Frage nicht, gelobt oder getadelt zu werden, sondern zu lernen.’

In English: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Wilhelm Meister's Travels, or the Renunciants*. Carlyle, Thomas (transl.). Chapman and Hall: London 1899, p. 314: 'Her companion, therefore, kept silence no longer, but blamed Hilaria for not coming forward with her own accomplishment, but lingering in this case as she always did; now where the question was not of being praised or blamed, but of being instructed.'

5 V. Gromov: 'Vstupitel'naia stat'ia'. In: Karolina Pavlova: *Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii*. Gaidenkov, N. (ed.): Sovetskii pisatel': Moscow 1964, p. 9.

A further difficulty for an aspiring woman author was the need to find a mentor. Unwritten rules of decency permitted a woman to approach an editor only on her mentor's approval. The publication of Volkova's poems, for instance, was initiated after her mother had mentioned them to Alexander Shishkov (1754–1841). In the foreword to her collection, he claims to approve of their quality. If a woman was sufficiently wealthy, she might venture to publish her works without a mentor's protection. However, to do so was still regarded as provocative, as illustrated in the case of Mariia Izvekova, who had her works printed without previously consulting anyone about their quality, which left Moscow's high society bewildered. Anna Bunina was one of the few women poets of the period to succeed in emancipating herself from her mentor's supervision. She published the original version of her poem, 'Padenie Faetona' (The Fall of Phaethon), without adopting any of the changes he had suggested.<sup>6</sup>

Women who decided to become professional writers stood in particular conflict with Sentimentalist men's expectations, who could only perceive of women writers in the role of a dilettante. Bunina encountered considerable difficulties in her determined endeavour to make a living as a writer.<sup>7</sup> It is on this evidence that doubts arose in the 1990s about the extent to which Karamzin's 'feminisation' of literature actually democratised relations between the sexes. According to American and Western European feminist literary studies, the notion of femininity was a male-defined concept which, despite woman's symbolic elevation, ultimately maintained gender-specific power relations.

It cannot be denied that the Sentimentalist conception of women preserved traditional gender patterns, since any literary production by a woman was regarded as a manifestation of her innate goodness. However, this should not prevent us from appreciating the democratic potential of the practice of accepting

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- 6 Anna Volkova: *Stikhotvoreniia*. Morskaia Tipografiia: St Petersburg 1807. 'Prevedomlenie ot izdatelia sei knigi; [foreword n.p.]; Karolin Khaider: "V sei knizhke est' chto-to zanimatel' noe, no...": Vospriiatie russkikh pisatel' nits v *Damskom zhurnale*'. In: Shore, Elizabeth (ed.): *Pol — Gender — Kul'tura. Nemetskie i russkie issledovaniia*. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet: Moscow 2000, pp. 131–153 (p. 146); Wendy Rosslyn: 'Conflicts over Gender and Status in Early Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature. The Case of Anna Bunina and her Poem "Padenie Faetona"'. In: Marsh, Rosalind (ed.): *Gender and Russian Literature. New Perspectives*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1996, pp. 55–74 (pp. 55–57).
- 7 Wendy Rosslyn: 'Anna Bunina's "Unchaste Relationship with the Muses". Patronage, the Market and the Woman Writer in Early Nineteenth-Century Russia'. *The Slavonic and East European Review* 74, 1996, pp. 223–242.

literary works by women from a wide range of backgrounds, even if this was due to essentialist assumptions. It should also be noted that, at the time, women often wrote literary works despite a limited mastery of the Russian language. Girls' education prioritised practical subjects such as housekeeping and needlework over intellectual ones; it was only after 1812 that the study of the Russian language became a compulsory subject in educational institutions for women. Before then, educated women were fluent in French rather than Russian. If men acted as mentors and editors of women's literary productions, it was not always a malicious act of patronage, but a way of helping women to improve their writing skills and editing their works for publication. There may also be a correlation between this practice and the increased number of female authors between 1820 and 1840 observed by Mikhail Fainshtein. Recent studies have noted the paradox that Sentimentalism's 'feminisation' of Russian culture seems to have inspired women to take up the pen despite their instrumentalisation and reduction to essentialist assumptions.<sup>8</sup>

Woman's situation in society was another issue addressed by Sentimentalist authors of either sex. Since women were regarded as sources of beauty and virtue, however, Sentimentalist discourse afforded to men alone the right to discuss women's social inequality. Nor were women permitted to use expressions which might display their intellectual power:

'In consequence of' and 'in order that' are unseemly coming from the mouth of 'a woman who, if we are to trust Ariost's portrait, was more beautiful than Venus.'<sup>9</sup>

Sentimentalist ethics banned women from the public sphere and, hence, from politics. Therefore, the writing of political pamphlets was denied to women who

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- 8 Natal'ia Pushkareva: 'Russian Noblewomen's Education in the Home as Revealed in Late 18<sup>th</sup>- and Early-19<sup>th</sup>-Century Memoirs'. In: Rosslyn, Wendy (ed.): *Women and Gender in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Russia*. Ashgate: Aldershot 2003, pp. 111–128 (p. 116); Mikhail Fainshtein: 'Russkie pisatel' nitsy 1820–1840 godov'. In: Göpfert, Frank (ed.): *Russland aus der Feder seiner Frauen. Zum femininen Diskurs in der russischen Literatur*. Sagner: München 1992, pp. 29–33 (p. 29); Carolin Heyder / Arja Rosenholm: 'Feminization as Functionalisation. The Presentation of Femininity by the Sentimentalist Man'. In: *Women and Gender in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Russia*, pp. 51–71 (p. 64–65).
- 9 '«Вследствие чего» et «дабы» sont insupportables dans la bouche «d'une femme qui, d'après le portrait de l'Arioste, était plus belle que Vénus»'. Quoted in Jean Breuillard: 'Positions féministes dans la vie littéraire russe. Fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> et début du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle'. *L'Enseignement du russe* 22, 1976, pp. 4–24, (pp. 7–13). Translation by Emily Lygo.

wanted to speak out against social injustice, both in real life and in the popular literature of the time. Some women therefore resorted to the use of poetry as a means of expressing their criticism, often embedding their messages in collections of idyllic poems and in poems about friendship and spring deemed to be appropriate for women. This is illustrated in some poems by Alexandra Murzina published in 1799. They refer to the intrinsic equal value of all human beings, accusing men of arrogance for their refusal to acknowledge the fact that God has created equally gifted men and women.<sup>10</sup> Although Murzina's work largely reproduces Sentimentalist literary ideals, it also demonstrates the potential for feminist criticism in adopting the liberal ideals which circulated in the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tapping into this potential, some women freed themselves from men's goodwill to articulate criticism of their oppression.

One woman who dared to enter the domain of literary criticism was the anonymous author of a review of Rousseau's *Julie*. Published in 1814, it bears the subtitle, 'Pis'mo rossiianki' (A Letter by a Russian Woman).<sup>11</sup> The author firstly justifies her incursion into the traditionally male domain of literary criticism by declaring that she does not aspire to enter the august world of literature but merely intends to give a piece of advice to a fellow Russian woman. She then proceeds to attack Rousseau's famous novel for being unrealistic in representing a man who expresses his desire for a woman in terms which flout the requirements of decency and are neither acceptable nor intelligible to a virtuous woman. She adduces several precise examples to illustrate her observations. The review's critical spirit reflects a cultural climate which encourages an increasing number of women to question the implications of Sentimentalist discourse on their lives, and to apply their critical minds and writing skills to the exposure of some of patriarchal society's less savoury aspects.

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10 Judith Vowles: 'The "Feminization" of Russian Literature. Women, Language, and Literature in Eighteenth-Century Russia'. In: *Women Writers in Russian Literature*, pp. 35–60 (p. 51).

For an English translation of this poem and an introduction to Murzina, see Amanda Ewington (ed. and transl.): *Russian Women Poets of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries*. Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at the University of Toronto: Toronto 2014, pp. 403–413.

See also my article on this topic,

Ursula Stohler: 'Released from Her Fetters? Natural Equality in the Work of the Russian Sentimentalist Woman Writer Mariia Bolotnikova'. *Aspasia. International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History* 2, 2008, pp. 1–27.

11 [Anon.]: 'O novoi Eloize: Pis'mo rossiianki'. *Vestnik Evropy* 9, 1814, p. 36–47.

In a culture which imposed essentialist conceptions on most women, some of them adopted the image of a morally superior being capable of effecting a morally improved society in order to break down the barriers between the public and private domains. Teaching the values of virtue was one way in which such women managed to enter and transfer values from the private, female realm into the (male) public sphere. Reinforcing an idealised image of woman, their endeavours occasionally produced contrary results, however. Elshtain observes a similar mechanism in the suffragettes' attempts to justify their access to the public forum of politics by claiming that a 'new evangel of womanhood' was required if society was to be changed for the better. She calls this the 'sentimentalization' of public language, stating that 'sentimentalization bore with it a tendency toward a sometimes censorious moralism, the voice of strained piety.'<sup>12</sup> Elevating woman's symbolic standing, the feminisation inherent in Sentimentalist culture offered women writers the chance to acquire positions of social recognition within its essentialist foundations. It is, however, precisely this identification of the woman poet with ideals of virtue and morals which renders many of their literary works difficult to appreciate due to their excessive moralising.

All the same, women writers did make use of their alleged innate goodness to justify their activity as writers. Sentimentalism's affiliation with enthusiastic religiosity, reinforced by the emergence in Russia of pietists and Protestant sects, gave women a voice to express their spirituality and to assume an authorial role. By identifying with the stereotypes which represented them as idealised, angelic, transcendental, and passionless, women writers acquired writerly authority, especially when they translated works of a religious nature. Lotman observes that 'secular poets undertaking versions of psalms is evidence of their conception of themselves as voices with quasi-religious authority'.<sup>13</sup> Women writers further conformed to Sentimentalist ideals of modesty when combining translated and original texts in their works.

The poet Anna Turchaninova's work, for example, is an expression of her religious conviction. It contains poems in which she discloses that God's image comes to life in her heart when she is praying, and that paradise blossoms in her soul during these moments. Longing for the hereafter, she asks God to illuminate her mind and heart. She is a writer who has adopted the Sentimentalist image of

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12 Jean Bethke Elshtain: *Public Man, Private Woman. Women in Social and Political Thought*. Princeton University Press: Princeton NJ 1993, pp. 231–233.

13 Cited in Wendy Rosslyn: 'Making their Way into Print. Poems by Eighteenth-Century Russian Women'. *The Slavonic and East European Review* 78, 2000, pp. 407–438 (p. 436).

female virtue and piety for her own ends. Similarly, as Greene's study suggests, Praskov'ia Bakunina (1810–1880) wrote works of a more religious nature for publication, whereas her unpublished works include poems which refer to folk literature, thereby conforming less to social expectations of women.<sup>14</sup>

## Women's justifications for their activities as writers

Women also made use of Sentimentalist discourse by endorsing the image of the poet as an interpreter of Creation, and referring to the idea that the production of literature was a spontaneous act, as outlined, for instance, in Karamzin's 'A Walk'. Since nature was regarded as a repository and outflow of divine providence, and the poet as its immediate interpreter, women—thought to be closer to nature than culture—benefitted from this concept when demonstrating their suitability for the profession as a writer.

The English poet Isabella Lickbarrow (1784–1847), who published her *Poetical Effusions* in 1814, likes to refer to the 'heart whose feelings overflow', and defines the creative process as an experience of which she expects that 'harmonious language, rich and strong, / Should in *spontaneous* numbers flow' (my emphasis).<sup>15</sup> The conception of literary creation as a spontaneous act rather than time-consuming labour, and women's view of this paradigm, reappeared in the course of Russian literary history from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In my Conclusion, I will address the different ways in which various women authors including Anna Bunina,

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14 Anna Turchaninova: 'Glas smertnago k Bogu'. In: Russian National Library, Russkii rukopisnyi fond, Fond Derzhavina № 43, XXV, pp. 101–107 (fol. 4).

On Turchaninova's predilection for Graveyard poetry in the style of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, see Ewington, pp. 361–365;

Diana Greene: 'Praskovia Bakunina and the Poetess' Dilemma'. In: Fainshtein, Mikhail (ed.): *Russkie pisatel' nitsy i literaturnyi protsess v kontse XVIII—pervoi treti XX vv.* Sbornik nauchnykh statei. Göpfert: Wilhelmshorst 1995, pp. 43–57 (pp. 44, 51–52).

Iu.V. Zhukova observes something similar with regard to Anna Bunina's albums and her published works: in the former, Bunina expresses herself far more openly about women's role in society than in the latter, see

Iu.V. Zhukova, "'Zhenskaia tema" na stranitsakh zhurnala "Aglaiia" (1808–1812 gg.) kn. P.I. Shalikova'. In: Ganelin. R. (ed.): *O blagorodstve i preimushchestve zhenskogo pola. Iz istorii zhenskogo voprosa v Rossii.* Sankt-Peterburgskaia gosudarstvennaia akademiia kul'tury: St Petersburg 1997, pp. 38–50 (pp. 44–45).

15 Isabella Lickbarrow: 'On the Difficulty of Attaining Poetic Excellence'. In: *Poetical Effusions*. Branthwaite: Kendal 1814; repr. Woodstock Books: Oxford 1994, pp. 22–24 (p. 23).

Evdokiia Rostopchina, Karolina Pavlova, Anna Akhmatova and Nadezhda L'vova expressed themselves on this topic.

The idea that literature is created in a spontaneous act was also central to the myth of the Romantic poet, which peaked between 1820 and 1840, a time when Sentimentalist ideals were in decline. There are, however, fundamental differences between Sentimentalist and Romantic myths of poetic creation, both in terms of poetic sources of inspiration and the conception of the poet. While Sentimentalism perceives nature as harmonious and idyllic, prompting poetic raptures, the Romantic view tends to focus on the violence of the elements as inspirations of poetic illumination. The Byronic hero receives his mission as a prophet for humanity in an Ossianic landscape dominated by raging oceans, steep cliffs and eagles' eyries on mountain peaks way out of reach. Romanticism places inspiration in the hands of an elemental divine force which cannot possibly be described as female, thereby perpetuating metaphorical patriarchal authority. Inspiration in Romanticism symbolises God's direct wish for man to fulfil the prophetic mission for which he has been chosen. The concept of nature as a female intermediary between the poet and the male divine will has been obliterated.<sup>16</sup>

A collection of poems, ostensibly by one Anna Smirnova, published in 1837, illustrates the fact that women found it easier to adopt the Sentimentalist conception of the poet as interpreter of Creation. Perhaps the author of this work is not, as the name suggests, a woman, but a man making fun of women's incursion into the field of authorship in the Romantic era. Whatever the case may be, the collection reflects the unease created by the presence of women and the literary presentation of the poet in Romanticism. In these poems, the female lyrical persona assumes imagery commonly associated with the Byronic poet. Appalled by her daring, one reviewer criticised the endeavour as highly unbecoming to a woman, exhorting her to address more feminine subjects, such as the world of feelings. To another reviewer, the combination of elevated and sublime metaphors with ideals of female etiquette was so disturbing that he assumed the author to be a man, and the poems a parody of the female endeavour to conquer Parnassus. He may have been correct in his assumption, which was perhaps due to the excessively self-confident introductory statement made by the (woman?) poet announcing

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16 On how Russian women authors responded to traditional male metaphors for writing, see also Irina Savkina: 'Mozhet li zhenshchina byt' romanticheskim poetom?' In: Rosenholm, Arja / Göpfert, Frank (eds): *Vieldeutiges Nicht-zu-Ende-Sprechen. Thesen und Momentaufnahmen aus der Geschichte russischer Dichterinnen*. Göpfert: Fichtenwalde 2002, pp. 97–111.

that further works would be published 'odin za drugim' (one after the other). The syntax in these poems is clumsy and overly complex; a great number of foreign words occur to flaunt erudition.

None of these features were particularly appropriate as evidence of the female modesty and naturalness expected of women authors. The clearest support of a suspicion that the poems are a satire on women's incursion in the field of literature comes from two lines in one of the poems quoted by the reviewer. They ridicule female authors wishing to emulate the Byronic hero by replacing the image of wild goats for the turtle dove: 'He горлинка летит дарить вентцом первенство, / Но козы дикия хотят воспеть геройство' (The turtle dove does not fly to crown the winner, / But wild goats desire to glorify heroics).<sup>17</sup> Similarly, as Greene has pointed out, critics heaped scorn on female poets who adopted a 'visionary, prophetic stance', including Ekaterina Shakhovskaia (d. 1848) and Alexandra Zrazhevskiaia (1805–1867), who were expected to choose topics associated with calmness.<sup>18</sup>

Women further justified their activities as authors by referring to themselves as 'muses'. Bunina calls her collections of poems *Neopytnaia Muza* (The Inexperienced Muse), and Pospelova was dubbed the 'Muse of the Kliaz'm River', a title which may have inspired Naumova to call her own work *Udinennaia muza zakamskikh beregov* (The Solitary Muse from the Kama Shores). To use the term 'muse' as a synonym for 'woman poet' was a way of establishing the identity of a woman actively engaged in the field of literature. However, the title of the 'muse' also had connotations of irrationality and non-conformity as revealed in texts by male poets in which they apologise for their muse, a symbol of their creative ability, who is lazy, capricious, fickle, unwilling or incapable of producing the artistic work expected from them by the public. Man did not consider *himself* to be unable to correspond to societal norms. If he did, the blame was firmly laid on a female entity. In the poetological work by French writer Nicolas Boileau, who regained popularity when neo-Classicism emerged in Russia in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the

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17 Translation by Emily Lygo.

18 Anna Smirnova: *Sobranie razlichnykh stikhotvorenii*. Tipografiia Vingebera: St Petersburg 1837;

[Anon.]: 'Sobranie razlichnykh stikhotvorenii. Sochinenie Anny Smirnovoi. Opyt v stikhakh piatnadsatiletnei devitsy Elisavety Shakhovoi. Lina Arfa'. In: *Literaturnoe pribavlenie k russkomu invalidu na 1838 god*. Tipografiia Pliushara: St Petersburg 1838, pp. 9–11;

[Anon.]: 'Sobranie razlichnykh stikhotvorenii. Sochinenie Anny Smirnovoi'. *Biblioteka dlia chteniia* 25, 1837, pp. 48–50;

Greene 1995, p. 44, 51–52.

female muse often embodies some kind of transgression. In his *L'Art poétique* (The Art of Poetry, 1674), for example, he praises the French author François de Malherbe for 'reducing the muse to the rules of duty'.<sup>19</sup>

The early-19<sup>th</sup>-century woman poet adopted this element of irrationality when claiming for herself the status of an author. With her incursion into the male-dominated world of authorship she committed an act akin to the muse's non-conformity and irrationality. Bunina apologises for the 'unruliness of the muses' when daring to publish a poem without taking into account the corrections suggested by her male mentors. 'Возложу ли вину на строптивость муз?' (Shall I lay blame on the stubbornness of the muses?), she asks.<sup>20</sup> Her use of the metaphor of the obstinate or unruly muse as a symbol for the gift of writing poetry here conveys the idea that she was unable or unwilling to control her creativity, her writing, for which she could not be held responsible even if it challenged the male literary establishment's expectations of female subordination. In addition to this subliminal association of the muse with social non-conformity, calling oneself a muse signalled a partial adherence to the image of the muse as an idealised female being who inspires others. This allowed women writers to avoid being perceived as aberrations of nature, which they were often thought to be.

Women poets employed different ways of coping with the traditional conceptions of muse and poet. The male artist traditionally receives inspiration for his

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19 Germaine Greer: *Slip-Shod Sibyls. Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet*. Viking: London 1995, p. 5;

'Et réduisit la muse aux règles du devoir'. Nicholas Boileau: *Satires, Épitres, Art poétique*. Collinet, Jean-Pierre (ed.). Gallimard: Paris 1985, pp. 227–258 (p. 230).

A similar attitude is reflected in Soames' English translation in the lyrical persona's reference to one author's 'haughty Muse' who despises others but whose downfall is eventually caused by her critics: 'and dash'd the hopes of his aspiring Muse', see Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux: *The Art of Poetry*. Soames, Wiliam (transl.). Bentley and Magnes: London 1683, p. 8.

On the topos of the muse in Russian 18<sup>th</sup>-century women's writing, see also Sandra Shaw Bennett: "'Parnassian Sisters" of Derzhavin's Acquaintance. Some Observations on Women's Writing in Eighteenth-Century Russia'. In: Salvo, Maria Di / Hughes, Lindsey (eds): *A Window on Russia. Papers from the V International Conference of the Study Group on Eighteenth-Century Russia. Gargnano 1994*. La Fenice: Rome 1996, pp. 249–256 (p. 251).

20 Anna Bunina: *Neopytnaia muza Anny Buninoi. Chast' vtoroia*. Morskaiia tipografia: St Petersburg 1812. 'Padenie Faetona', pp. 80–142 (p. 81). Translation by Emily Lygo.

creative work from a female character; his muse is often a passive and depersonalised source of inspiration. In order to reproduce the idea of male poet and female muse, some women poets performed a gender shift, an inversion of the narrator's voice and biological sex. This had the disadvantage, however, that female characters tended to be mute. Before the 1840s, it was uncommon for women to reverse the gender configuration to celebrate man as the source of inspiration for their poems. If and when it did occur, it was regarded as inappropriate: a reviewer accused the poet Taisa Sokolova of loose morals on the grounds that her poem presented an idealised image of her husband.<sup>21</sup>

In her quest to reinvent female literary characters, a Sentimentalist woman author such as Naumova conceptualised the muse as a character of authority who exerts a masculine, penetrative, phallic power over the rather effeminate poet. This was a complete inversion of conventional power relations between poet and muse. Rather than being merely the embodiment of beauty which the artist desires to capture in his work, the muse commands great respect.

## Sappho—a literary model

Another female literary character associated with women writers was Sappho, the Greek lyrical poet (c. 630/612 BCE–c. 570 BCE). Although, or perhaps precisely because, details of her life are sketchy and contested, she exerted a powerful influence throughout European culture. Since the Renaissance, Western European literature has made frequent reference to the myth of Sappho's passionate love for Phaon. References to her suicide, in particular, may well manifest a patriarchal culture which seeks to push the woman author from the heights of her fame into a sea of oblivion. Russian Sentimentalism is no exception here, as I will demonstrate shortly.

The first translation of an ode by Sappho, Sumarokov's 'Gimn Afrodite' (Hymn to Aphrodite), was printed in 1758. Evgenii Sviiasov's study shows that Sappho became an important literary model for Russian poets in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, as Diana Burgin observes, Sappho was en vogue in Russian literary journals in the first third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> In the course of two centuries, then,

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21 'Stikhotvoreniia Taisy Sokolovoi'. *Otechestvennyia zapiski na 1841 god* 17, 1842, pp. 56–57; Greer, p. 4.

22 Diana Burgin: 'The Deconstruction of Sappho Stolz. Some Russian Abuses and Uses of the Tenth Muse'. In: Chester, Pamela / Forrester, Sibelan (eds): *Engendering Slavic Literatures*. Indiana University Press: Bloomington 1996, pp. 13–30 (p. 15).

Sappho became an eminent literary model; more Russian works were dedicated to her than to any other writer from antiquity. From the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the name of Sappho was synonymously applied to an increasing number of women poets. Sumarokov, for example, called Elizaveta Kheraskova (1767–1852) ‘a new Sappho’. It was not long, however, before the name of Sappho designating ‘woman poet’ began to carry ironic overtones, a tendency which intensified in the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century, when Konstantin Batiushkov wrote a sarcastic madrigal which refers to the myth of Sappho’s suicide and was most probably aimed at Bunina, who was called a ‘Russian Sappho’:

Ты Сафо, я Фаон; об этом я не спорю:  
Но, к моему ты горю,  
Пути не знаешь к морю.<sup>23</sup>

*You are Sappho, I am Phaon; I will not argue this:  
But, to my sadness, you  
Don't know the way to the sea.*<sup>24</sup>

Batiushkov’s madrigal requires the woman poet to disappear from the male-dominated context of literature by killing herself like her mythical precursor. Another Russian poet to elaborate on this myth is Vasilii Kapnist (1758–1823). In a prefatory note to his poem, ‘Stikhi na izobrazhenie Safy’ (Poems in Imitation of Sappho), published in 1815, Kapnist explains that in antiquity a bee was often painted next to the lyre to symbolise the instrument’s sweet music. He links the image to Sappho’s poetry:

С розы собранны, с тимьяна,  
Сладок, пчелка! Нам твой мед:  
Сафо, миртой увенчанна,  
Слаще о любви поет.  
Мило нам твое жужжанье,  
Как с весной летишь ты в луг:

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23 Evgenii Sviasov: ‘Safo i “zhenskaia poezia” kontsa XVIII—nachala XIX vekov’. In: Fainshtein, Mikhail (ed.): *Russkie pisatel’ nitsy i literaturnyi protsess v kontse XVIII—pervoi treti XX vv*, Göpfert: Wilhelmshorst 1995, pp. 11–28 (pp. 11–15).

On this topic,

see also Frank Göpfert: ‘Russische Dichterinnen des 18. Jahrhunderts im Selbst- und Fremdverständnis klassizistischer Dichtung. Elizaveta Cheraskova und Ekaterina Uru-sova’. In: Rosenholm, Arja / Göpfert, Frank (eds): *Vieldeutiges Nicht-zu-Ende-Sprechen. Thesen und Momentaufnahmen aus der Geschichte russischer Dichterinnen*. Göpfert: Fichtenwalde 2002, pp. 21–40.

24 Translation by Emily Lygo.

Мирных струн ея бряцанье  
Нежит более наш слух.  
Грации ужались руку  
В греве свойственно тебе:  
Сафо стрел любовных муку  
Ощущала лишь в себе.  
Часто, лакомством манима,  
В сладких тонешь ты сотах.  
Сафо, ревностью гонима,  
В ярых погреблась волнах.<sup>25</sup>

*Gathered from roses and from thyme,  
Your honey, bee, is sweet for us:  
Sappho, crowned with myrtle, sings  
A sweeter song of love.  
Your buzzing, too, is sweet to us,  
When in the spring you fly to the meadow:  
the strumming of her peaceful strings  
Is more tender to our ear.  
Graces have stung the hand  
In sorrow typical for you:  
The pain of Sappho's arrows of love  
You felt only within yourself.  
Often, drawn by a sugary treat,  
You drown in the sweet cells of the comb.  
Sappho, pursued by jealousy,  
Rowed into the wild waves.<sup>26</sup>*

Here, Sentimentalism's association of woman with nature manifests itself in the comparison of the woman poet to a bee. It is a trivialising image, however flattering the allegory may have been intended to be. Once he has celebrated the sweetness of the poetess' songs, Kapnist follows the same path as many of his colleagues and lets her perish in the sea.

The subliminal message conveyed by these poems to women authors was that the only way for a woman to overcome sadness was to die. Sappho's gift for writing is not reason enough for her to stay alive, and, unlike Arion's, her lyre does not save her from drowning. According to the ancient legend, bandits pushed Arion, the bard, from their ship into the sea; Arion only survived because he was able to hold on to his lyre which floated on the water until a dolphin took him

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25 Vasilii Kapnist: 'Stikhi na izobrazhenie Safy'. *Trudy kazanskago obshchestva liubiteli otechestvennoi slovesnosti* 1, 1815, pp. 224–245.

26 Translation by Emily Lygo.

back to the mainland. Rosslyn demonstrates how Bunina took up Arion's myth in her 1809 collection of poems, at the beginning of which she used it as visual motif, to which she added the words, 'The lyre saved me from sinking' (лира спасла меня от потопления).<sup>27</sup>

Due to the association of Sappho with self-destruction, some women writers of the time may have been reluctant to adopt her as a model for their writing. The irony and sarcasm heaped on the Greek poet by the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century may be another reason why women writers such as Bunina or Naumova disliked being called a 'Russian Sappho.' Naumova does, however, make an oblique reference to Sappho's suicide when her lyrical persona declares that she will not follow the ancient model.

Another reference to Sappho can be found in Bunina's *Inexperienced Muse*, as Rosslyn's study demonstrates. Bunina challenges tradition by presenting Sappho's expression of passion not as emotional abandon, but as the lyrical persona's artistic reflection. As Greene has shown, a further example of the use of Sappho in Russian women's poetry can be found in a poem by Kul'man which, rather than her alleged suicide, 'emphasises Sappho's glory and great stature as a poet.'<sup>28</sup>

Self-abandon was not necessarily the end of the woman poet, but could serve as an occasion for self-reflection and a source of new creative power. In their article on Karolina Pavlova, Stephanie Sandler and Judith Vowles show that she was inspired by the memory of her attachment to the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz after their relationship ended due to his not having the means to marry her. The two scholars argue that

... from Pavlova's reflections on their relationship came a way of defining rather than destroying, Sappho-like, her poetic identity and poetic voice. [...] Separation generated some of her most interesting poems about the self, and about the thinking self in particular, in part because she embraced the paradoxical dimensions of a topic that threatened the self with destruction but also liberated the poetic voice to speak.

Joan DeJean also shows that women authors often rewrote the myth of Sappho's death. As Sandler and Vowles argue, 'in these revisions, abandonment has meant not the end of the woman poet, but her beginning.' These examples support the thesis of the feminist scholar Alicia Ostriker, who argues that female poets often

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27 Wendy Rosslyn: *Anna Bunina (1774–1829) and the Origins of Women's Poetry in Russia*. Mellen: Lewiston 1997, p. 111.

28 Rosslyn 1993, pp. 147–153;  
Greene 1994, p. 99.

try to rewrite patriarchal myths in order to adapt them to the experiences of women.<sup>29</sup>

The conflict between the male-dominated interpretation of the myth of Sappho's death and women's corrective efforts continued to feature in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Russian literature. In this context, Sviiasov mentions Mirra Likhvitskaia (1869/1870–1905), approvingly designated 'Sappho', i.e. woman poet, in contrast to the disparaging early-19<sup>th</sup>-century use of the name. However, her poem, 'Sopernitse' (To a Female Rival, 1896–1898), which conveys the lyrical persona's impressions as she contemplates the sea, is scathingly reviewed by one literary critic for deviating from the classical legend. He reminds her of Sappho's fate, which he implicitly encourages her to follow:

Пусть г-жа Лохвицкая вспомнит хотя бы классический пример Сафо. На что даровитая поэтесса, а звоном струны не пленила Фаона и бросилась в море с отчаяния.<sup>30</sup>

*Let Mme Likhvitskaia recall at least the classical example of Sappho. However talented the poetess was, she failed to entrap Phaon with the sound of her strings and threw herself into the sea in despair.<sup>31</sup>*

This shows the strong association of Sappho's model with self-destruction, and the criticism encountered by women writers wanting to revise the literary pattern.

## Revisions of pastoral gender patterns

The common pastoral gender pattern reduces women to mute objects of male adoration, symbols of harmony with Creation. Some Sentimentalist women writers challenged this pattern. In Bunina's poem, 'Liviia: Idillia' (Livia: An Idyll), published in her 1809 collection, for instance, a shepherdess complains about

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29 Stephanie Sandler / Judith Vowles: 'Abandoned Meditation. Karolina Pavlova's Early Poetry'. In: Fusso, Susanne / Lehmann, Alexander (eds): *Essays on Karolina Pavlova*. Northwestern University Press: Evanston IL 2001, pp. 32–52 (pp. 33–34); Joan DeJean: *Fictions of Sappho. 1546–1937*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1989.

Alicia Ostriker: 'The Thieves of Language. Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking'. In: Showalter, Elaine (ed.): *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory*. Pantheon: New York 1985, pp. 314–338.

30 Sviiasov, p. 22.

31 Translation by Emily Lygo.

unrequited love.<sup>32</sup> The female protagonist appears in a setting reminiscent of the *locus terribilis*, i.e. of the emotional hell traditionally experienced by the disappointed shepherd. Unusually for a Sentimentalist shepherdess, Livia is not sitting by a refreshing little brook or in a shady grove. Instead, on a hot summer's day, she sits bareheaded in a desert of sand and stones, busily smashing a rock to pieces. She is lovesick, an emotional state the pastoral usually only grants to men, expressing her distress in elegiac speeches. This transforms the man she loves into the object of the love plot, a remote creature without a voice of his own, who provides an opportunity for the female persona to articulate her concerns. Bunina has inverted the traditional functions the pastoral ascribes to men and women.

In her poem 'Maiskaia progulka boliashchei' (The Sick Woman's Maytime Stroll), Bunina uses the pastoral's contrasting images of the *locus amoenus* and the *locus terribilis*, also combining the latter with metaphors whose origins lay in Petrarchan love lyrics. Her female lyrical persona bears the features of the *locus terribilis* as she goes for a stroll one beautiful day in May, the month of lovers. Contrary to what might be expected of a female persona in Sentimentalist culture, she cannot find happiness in the idyllic setting in which nature is flourishing. Rather, the beauty of the *locus amoenus* around her creates a painful contrast to her own suffering. She lives in a *locus terribilis* described in apocalyptic images: hell is lodged in her soul; a volcano scorches her parched breast; a greedy serpent writhes about her heart, sucking her seething blood. The lovely May setting contrasts so sharply with her own feelings that she firmly dissociates herself from Creation, exclaiming that she is no daughter of this nature. The woman in this poem is sick; what she is suffering from, the poem does not reveal.

Nevertheless, in the neo-Classicist tradition which inspires many of Bunina's poems, a person who feels ill in the face of spring's beauty can only be lovesick. Bunina's narrator therefore occupies a hitherto exclusively male position in the pastoral, i.e. to voice and describe passion, even if surreptitiously so. Apart from challenging the pastoral's gender pattern, the poem may also be an allusion to Bunina's grave illness due to breast cancer.<sup>33</sup>

Another female poet who found a subtle way of applying pastoral imagery to the situation of a woman is Alexandra Khvostova. In her prose poem, 'Ruchek' (The Brooklet), she creates a contrast between a *locus amoenus*, i.e. nature in

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32 Anna Bunina: *Neopytnaia muza*. Tipografia Shnora: St Petersburg 1809. 'Liviia: Idillia', pp. 7–9.

33 Bunina 1812, 'Maiskaia progulka boliashchei', pp. 30–33.

bloom, and the female lyrical persona's bleak state of mind. As with Bunina, the divergence from the gender pattern of the pastoral is intriguing. Rather than a man grieving the absence of his beloved shepherdess, the poem presents a daughter lamenting the death of her father. The female narrator is sitting beside a brook, a standard component of a *locus amoenus*. The merry babbling of its waters contrasts vividly with the narrator's lifelessness and grief which runs through her veins like a deathly chill:

Жизнь течет в жилах моих, но в них нет жизни; смерть давно уже гнездится в томном сердце моем.....<sup>34</sup>

*Life flows in my veins, but there is no liveliness in them; death has long already settled in my heavy heart...*<sup>35</sup>

Here, the narrator's bleak state of mind is not associated with Petrarchan imagery, whose passionate intensity would be inappropriate in a father-daughter relationship. Rather, the mental *locus terribilis* manifests itself in a fascination with the afterlife akin to that of Gothic literature: the daughter utters her wish to remain at her father's grave until death comes to claim her, too. Without making use of their imagery, the daughter's longing for death alludes to Petrarchan love lyrics where the only point in the lover's life is to be with his beloved. If this cannot be, he has lost any reason to live. Khvostova reproduces these ideals, adapting them, however, to a father-daughter relationship, which was considered more fitting for a Sentimentalist woman writer than passionate descriptions of emotional distress about the loss of a male lover.

In one of her elegiac poems, Elizaveta Dolgorukova (1766–18??) uses the Sentimentalist topos of friendship with a similar aim as her female narrator expresses her grief over the death of her sister. Even though the narrator is not in a pastoral setting, her death wish uses similar imagery to evoke the traditional male lover's complaint about being separated from his beloved.<sup>36</sup>

Another example of a woman poet inverting the pastoral's traditional gender roles is the 1799 poem by Anna Sergeevna Zhukova (?–1799), 'Suprugu moemu, s kotorym ia v razluke' (To My Husband, from Whom I am Separated).<sup>37</sup> It expresses a wife's sadness at her husband's absence of several years. In allusions typical to the pastoral, the lyrical persona describes autumn and approaching winter;

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34 Aleksandra Khvostova: *Otryvki*. Tipografia gosudarstvennoi meditsinskoi kollegii: St Petersburg 1797. 'Rucheek', pp. 31–48 (p. 34).

35 Translation by Emily Lygo.

36 Ewington, pp. 367–379.

37 Ewington, pp. 381–389.

rivers are frozen, the natural environment reflects her bleak state of mind. There is no association of spring with women in this poem; the author gives her narrator free rein to voice her grief.

Yet another woman author to employ the topos of grief about personal loss in her poetry was Zhukova's sister, Elizaveta Neelova (dates unknown). While the setting of 'Elegiia na smert' suprug'a i bolezn' sestry' (Elegy on the Death of My Husband and on My Sister's Illness, 1799) is not a pastoral, the lyrical persona clearly expresses her death wish.<sup>38</sup>

The English poet Charlotte Smith (1749–1806) provides an example of a narrator expressing emotional grief without overstepping the marks of female modesty and decency. 'Spring', published in 1789 as a part of her *Elegiac Sonnets*, does not reveal her narrator's sex. Nevertheless, Smith's intended readership was likely to associate the female author with the lyrical persona. Contrary to the Sentimentalist conception of women, she experiences idyllic spring-time nature as a painful contrast to her own emotional world:

#### To Spring

Again the wood, and long with-drawing vale,  
In many a tint of tender green are drest,  
Where the young leaves unfolding, scarce conceal  
Beneath their early shade, the half-form'd nest  
Of finch or wood-lark; and the primrose pale,  
And lavish cowslip, wildly scatter'd round,  
Give their sweet spirits to the sighing gale.  
Ah! Season of delight!—could aught be found  
To soothe awhile the tortur'd bosom's pain,  
Of Sorrow's rankling shaft to cure the wound,  
And bring life's first delusions once again,  
'Twere surely met in thee!—thy prospect fair,  
Thy sounds of harmony, thy balmy air,  
Have power to cure all sadness—but despair.<sup>39</sup>

What renders this (woman's) lyrical complaint acceptable is the fact that Smith does not dwell on depictions of the mental *locus terribilis*, alluding merely to her narrator's emotional pain.

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38 Ewington, pp. 391–401.

39 Charlotte Smith: In: *Elegiac Sonnets*. Cadell: London 1789; repr. Woodstock Books: Oxford 1992. 'To Spring', p. 8.

Rather than revise traditional representations of female characters, some women writers chose alternative poetic metaphors to broach topics deemed appropriate. The brook, part of the idyllic landscape which Sentimentalism associated with women, was one such metaphor used by female authors wishing to reflect on the inconsistency of friendship and on the transitoriness of all earthly things. Male writers occasionally associated life's ephemeral nature with regrets about the transitoriness of woman's beauty, and with Anacreon's call to *carpe diem*, 'seize the day'. The topic of love was a delicate one for women writers, which is why they often preferred to write contemplative idylls that avoided the subject.

In her 1688 poem, 'Le ruisseau' (The Brook), French author Antoinette du Ligier de La Garde Deshoulières (c. 1638–1694) provided an important model for the metaphor of the brook as a means for women to ponder life's fleeting nature. A celebrated poet, Deshoulières spent most of her life in Paris. Her poetic reflections on the human condition express regret about humanity's loss of innocence in the emergence of civilisation. Simple contemplations of natural phenomena such as a brook or a flock of sheep remind the narrator of Creation's unsullied, admirable naivety, making her feel humankind's present corrupted state the more acutely.<sup>40</sup>

Deshoulières' work began to be known in Russia from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, with several translations of her poems appearing in subsequent years. Among her translators was Ippolit Bogdanovich (1743–1803), the author of the poem 'Dushen 'ka'. His translation of Deshoulières' 'The Brook' appeared in 1761, in a version which largely omitted the poetess' accusation of male arrogance and belief to be entitled to rule over nature. However, as Joachim Klein argues in his seminal study on 18<sup>th</sup>-century Russian literature, Bogdanovich deviates from the French original by introducing calls for social equality. Further translations of Deshoulières' idylls appeared in the journal *Vechera* (The Evenings) in 1772. As Rosslyn suggests, the one by Mariia Sushkova (1752–1803) is much closer to the original than Bogdanovich, preserving Deshoulières' criticism of man's aspirations to power. Frank Göpfert observes that Deshoulières' 'The Brook' initiated a surge of Sentimentalist imitations. Even as late as 1807, Alexei Merzliakov published a collection of her works

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40 Antoinette du Ligier de La Garde Deshoulières: *Poésies de Mme Deshoulières. Nouvelle édition augmentée de plusieurs ouvrages*. [n.pub.]: Bruxelles 1740. 'Le ruisseau', pp. 128–132;

Alain Niderst: 'Deshoulières, Antoinette'. In: Beaumarchais, Jean-Pierre de et al. (eds): *Dictionnaire des littératures de langue française*. Bordas: Paris 1994, p. 668;

[Anon.]: 'Des Houlières, Antoinette du Ligier de La Garde'. In France, Peter (ed.): *The New Oxford Companion to Literature in French*. Clarendon Press: Oxford 1995, p. 234.

under the title *Idillii gospozhi Dezul'er* (Mme Deshoulières' Idylls), proof of her continuing popularity.<sup>41</sup>

Scholars such as M. Koreneva have argued that Deshoulières' contemplative idylls were largely 'unproductive' in Russia's literature of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which marks the emergence of the Russian love idyll. Nevertheless, a considerable number of Russian women writers at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries emulated Deshoulières' meditative idylls, elaborating on the topos of the brook with its idyllic, feminine connotations, as a symbol of the inconsistency of both life and romantic love, a topic not addressed by the French woman poet. 'Ruche' (The Brook, 1796), a poem by Ekaterina Urusova (1747–after 1816), quite clearly refers to Deshoulières' idyll insofar as Urusova's narrator expresses her wish to lead the kind of calm, dispassionate, contemplative life exemplified by the clear waters of the brook. Three years later, alluding to her 1796 poem, Urusova

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41 *Dezul'er*, Antuanetta: *Idillii gospozhi Dezul'er*: Alexei Merzliakov (transl.): Tipografiia Platona Beketova: Moscow 1807;

Joachim Klein: *Die Schäferdichtung des russischen Klassizismus*. Harrasowitz: Berlin 1988, pp. 45–46;

M. Koreneva: 'Poeziia. Glava III'. In: Levin, Jurii (ed.): *Schöne Literatur in russischer Übersetzung. Von den Anfängen bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*. (2 vols). Böhlau: Köln 1996, Vol. II, pp. 122–139 (p. 133);

Frank Göpfert: 'Observations on the Life and Work of Elizaveta Kheraskova (1737–1809)'. In: *Women and Gender in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Russia*, pp. 163–86 (p. 171);

Ioakhim Klein: *Puti kul' turnogo importa. Trudy po russkoi literature XVIII veka*. Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury: Moscow 2005, pp. 56–71.

Klein here also refers to Mikhail Kheraskov's translations of Jean-Baptiste-Louis Gresset's (1709–1777) idyll inspired by Deshoulières's meditative idylls, 'Le siècle pastoral' (The pastoral age, 1734).

The importance of works by Deshoulières and her daughter Thérèse for Russian literature also clearly emerges from Reinhard Lauer's study on 18<sup>th</sup>-century poetic forms, Reinhard Lauer: *Gedichtform zwischen Schema und Verfall. Sonett, Rondeau, Madrigal, Ballade, Stanze und Triolett in der russischen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts*. Fink: München 1975, pp. 91, 206, 254, 258, 259;

Wendy Rosslyn: 'Mar'ya Vasil'evna Sushkova. An Enlightened Woman of the Eighteenth Century'. In: Smith, Gerald et al. (eds): *Oxford Slavonic Papers*. Clarendon Press: Oxford 2000, pp. 85–107 (pp. 93–95);

Frank Göpfert: *Russische Autorinnen von der Mitte bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts. Teil 1. 1750–1780*, Göpfert: Fichtenwalde 2007, p. 296.

published another poetic work featuring a brook.<sup>42</sup> In the same year, Khvostova published her prose poem, 'Ruchek' (The Brooklet). This turned out to be probably the most popular of the works inspired by Deshoulières' idyll.<sup>43</sup>

It is likely that Pospelova was also inspired by these women authors given that in 1801 she published a prose poem entitled 'Ruchek' (The Brooklet), itself a reflection on the ephemeral quality of life and harmful human passions. In 1807 Volkova based her poem, 'The Brooklet', on Khvostova's prose text. A footnote refers to Khvostova as the author of the original Russian work; Volkova noted that it had made a lasting impression on her when in a similar frame of mind, and she requests Khvostova's permission to re-create her prose text as a poem.

Bolotnikova's poem 'Vospominanie' (Memory) also features the topos of the brook, even if the tone is elegiac rather than contemplative. Here, the lyrical persona asks the brook to carry her thoughts to her beloved.<sup>44</sup>

## Summary and Outlook

Chapter Three has explored ways in which Russian women writers responded to Sentimentalist gender concepts, which can be summarised as follows: in their choice of topics these writers were expected to conform to requirements of decency, virtue, and modesty, and to write in a Sentimental style which did not betray their intellectual abilities. Rather than striving to become professional writers, they were confined to dilettantism; each publication required a mentor's approval. Women who wished to be recognised as authors had to find ways to justify their activity, for instance, by appearing to adopt the Sentimentalist notion that women bore greater affinity to nature than culture.

Sometimes they presented themselves as fervently religious in order to acquire symbolic authority. They named their poetic personae after a muse, who is traditionally the source of inspiration rather than the actual creator of a literary work. Any attempts to reverse traditional gender connotations of male author and female muse were unwelcome. Sappho, the female poet from ancient Greece, provided women writers with a role model, but only until her name came to be negatively connoted. Inspired by Sappho's poems, women writers did try to revise the literary

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42 Ekaterina Urusova: 'Ot sochnitel'nitsy "Ruch'ia" otvet na otvet'. *Ippokrena* 71, 1799, pp. 303–304.

43 By 1844, having appeared as *Fragments* (Otryvki) together with another prose poem, 'The Fireplace' (Kamin), Khvostova's 'The Brooklet' had been reprinted four times.

44 When the speaker notices that the brook disappears into an abyss, however, she entrusts her thoughts to the winds.

model of the female poet who has to commit suicide when the person she loves abandons her.

Potential conflicts with requirements of decency made love a delicate topic for women to address. They therefore sometimes disguised it by using the pastoral imagery of the *locus amoenus* and the *locus terribilis*, and occasionally adding Gothic images. The motivation for a protagonist's death wish shifts from the traditional topos of the heart-sick, rejected male lover to physical illness or grief about the loss of a friend or family member. Eventually, emulating French author Mme Deshoulières, women writers responded to Sentimentalist gender conventions by adhering to the idea of women's affinity with nature and choosing the topos of philosophical reflections on the inconstancy of human life, inspired by the observation of a brook, one of the main features of a Sentimentalist idyllic landscape.

In this chapter I have also outlined some of the literary conventions that reigned in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and presented some of the ways in which writers of either sex approached them.

Each of the three women authors who stand at the centre of this study responded differently to these literary conventions. Pospelova's work, written at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, includes idylls, panegyric and religious odes, pastorals, and moral reflections, mainly to celebrate a male-dominated earthly paradise in which women symbolise harmony. Bolotnikova, by contrast, questions and challenges many of the values reproduced in Pospelova's work. Written more than fifteen years after Pospelova's writings, Bolotnikova's mirror the more politically active climate of her day in poems which feature reflections on the notion of equality. Naumova is the most innovative, varied, and controversial author of the three. Her work ranges from a revision of gender roles in pastorals to depictions of salon culture and divination rituals, to deconstructions of the role of women in Sentimentalist idylls. She rewrites many patriarchal myths, including the notion that women are unable to conquer emotional distress. Her representation of Fate is associated with a call on individuals to act upon reasonable reflection and within their boundaries. By including confident female characters, Naumova revises aspects of Sentimentalist discourse, which largely regard women as naive and vulnerable creatures.